

## **Archbishop Thabo Makgoba**

### **Eucharist – George Diocese Pastoral Visit, 29 April 2010**

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*Eucharist Readings: Acts 13:13-25; Ps 89:1-2,19-27; Jn 13:16-20*

Dear clergy and people of the Diocese of St George, may I speak to you in the precious name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who died and who was raised to new life:

Alleluia, Christ is risen! We are risen, Alleluia!

In the middle of this Easter season, it may seem a little odd that the lectionary gives us a gospel passage from the height of the Passion – from the Passover meal that Jesus shares with his disciples before betrayal and crucifixion.

And yet I can hardly think of a more appropriate reading for the situation we find ourselves facing today – caught between the human fallibility and failing and the promise of redemption.

The immediately preceding verses recount how Jesus washed his disciples' feet.

He then asked them 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord – and you are right, for that is what I am. So, if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed our feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.'

'Do you know what I have done to you?' asks the one who also said 'The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' (Mt 20:28).

Well, today we must say that there are some who have not truly known what Jesus did; who have not understood that Christian leadership is a calling 'not to be served, but to serve'.

Jesus, our master, came as the servant of all.

And today's gospel goes on to say this: servants are not greater than their masters.

Therefore, we who are called to Christian leadership can never be more than the servant of all.

But some have not acted as servants, according to the example our master has set. Instead they have acted for their own self-interest, their own self-advancement, making themselves great.

Therefore it is not surprising if we have a sense of being betrayed – betrayed by those in whom we put our trust as Christian leaders.

Jesus speaks to us in our frustration, our anger, our sorrow – for he too was about to experience betrayal from within the innermost circle of his disciples.

He quotes the scripture – 'The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.'

We in our turn say, 'the ones with whom we have broken bread and shared wine at the table of our Lord, have abused our fellowship, have abused the life of the body of Christ.'

But what shall we do now – where shall we go from here?

Do we despair and say that the Church has failed, has failed us utterly, and is bankrupt not only financially but spiritually, and beyond saving?

By no means – and this is the most important message of today, the message of this passage from the Passion, read in the season of Easter.

Jesus Christ willingly gave his life for us, for his Church, for human-kind, because he knew we needed saving.

He knew that human beings are frail and fallible, and we get things wrong.

For we are all sinners.

We get things wrong as individuals, and we get things wrong as a Church.

Sometimes we fail in small and secret ways, and sometimes we make choices that are disastrously bad and very public.

This is the reality that Jesus knowingly, willingly, gave his life to redeem.

And this redemption he has completed.

Easter has come.

Redemption is possible.

Our future can be one of hope.

Our gospel passage ended with these words: 'Whoever received me, receives him who sent me.'

We are to receive Jesus, the one who was both crucified and raised.

He was crucified – yes, because he accepted that human beings are sinners, and are prone to fail.

So we are here today, acknowledging that failure has happened.

And those who have failed must take responsibility for it, and admit their shortcomings, their guilt.

But Jesus was raised – which brings us to the possibility of redemption.

By this, I do not mean that we will let people off the hook, as if it all did not matter – no, not at all.

The necessary steps must and will be taken.

But we can go forward, in the expectation that God is a redemptive God.

He WILL work in the tragedy of these failings, to bring about a new beginning, a fresh start, for this Diocese and its clergy and people.

Jesus, facing his own betrayal, invites us to receive him.

So, dear sisters and brothers in Christ, people of God of the Diocese of St George,

- receive the one who was himself betrayed;
- receive the one who weeps for our failings, and gives his life for us;
- and receive the one who willing died that we might find redemption from our own sins, and from the sins of others that impact upon us.

And let us allow Jesus, through his broken body, his spilt blood, to feed us today, and strengthen us with his hope, to go forward as Easter people – receiving the redemption he offers us.

And let us, in the midst of all this, not be afraid to say: Alleluia, Christ is risen – we are risen, Alleluia!

Amen.